

Representative Valentine sends her apologies for not being able to testify herself ~~a~~ regarding the bills before this committee today. I am pleased to speak to you today on behalf of Rep. Valentine's proposed legislation.

It is appropriate that the Ethics and Elections committee should take up HB 4880 and 4881 at this point in time. Tomorrow, August 26, marks the 90 anniversary of the 19th amendment granting women the right to vote. For 70 years women struggled against all odds for the same right and privilege automatically bestowed on white men. Their struggle was no different ~~than~~^{from} every other ~~ethnic~~ group - Native Americans, Chinese, Blacks - who were not automatically deemed to have this right. The collective struggle of these groups is a testament to the power of the right to vote.

HB 4880 protects that right by providing serious consequences for persons who knowingly or intentionally provide false or misleading information to an elector concerning an elector's right to vote. Violation of HB 4880 would be a felony punishable by up to five years in prison. HB 4881 is tie-barred to HB 4880 and amends the criminal code to provide for this sentence.

Rep. Valentine asks that I share with you her belief that the right to vote is "better than gold." Men and women have fought and died to secure this right. If a person steals your television, your wallet or your automobile, they face consequences. Someone who steals your right to vote should also face consequences and those consequences should be severe.

There are numerous instances from across the country of people who have used devious and misleading tactics to prevent Americans from voting, including:

- Discouraging college students by telling them they are prohibited from voting in the city where they attend school
- Telling those with criminal records, who are disproportionately minorities and low-income Americans, they are prohibited from voting
- Perpetuating lies that people with outstanding parking tickets, traffic violations, unpaid child support, utility bills, mortgage payments or other fines are ineligible to vote
- Distributing information in high foreclosure areas that those with homes in foreclosure have lost their right to vote
- Sending letters or posting signs that polling locations have been changed, that the date of the election has changed or that, if the lines are too long, you can return the next day to cast your ballot
- Distributing letters which direct those casting absentee ballots to mail them to an incorrect address

Michigan is not immune to these underhanded tactics by people who would happily strip others of the power of their vote. As legislators, you have the authority to provide consequences to those who would undermine the privilege so many people struggled for so long to secure. Rep. Valentine asks that you pass HB 4880 and 4881 out of committee without delay.